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## **GOLD BUTTERFLY** **COLLABORATIVE FIELD TRIP NOTES**

Where: Gold Butterfly  
Project Area

Date: October 23, 2017

Time: 1300-1715

Notes Taken by: Marilyn Wildey, Tami Sabol

Attendees: Bitterroot Restoration Committee: Kirk Thompson, Larry Jakub, Mick Harrington, Paul Roege, Gail Roege

Ravalli County Cooperative: Steve Schmidt, Kelsey Milner, Marc Cooke, Rod Daniel, Jeff Burrows, Van Keele

Forest Service: Nate Barber, Dave Lockman, Jo Christensen, Cheri Hartless, Marilyn Wildey, Cole Mayn, Tami Sabol

### **SUMMARY**

Review the proposed action with Ravalli County Collaborative and Bitterroot Restoration Committee. Visited 4 sites in the central and south part of the project area: Eastman Saddle, Junction of FR 13111 and FR 364, OHV restoration area and Junction of FR 364 and FR 969.

### **DISCUSSION**

Welcome and Introductions at the Supervisors Office. Load up vehicles and travel to project area.

#### **Eastman Saddle**

##### **Overview of Project**

Purpose and Need: Improve landscape resilience to disturbance (such as insects, diseases and fire) by modifying forest structure and composition and fuels; provide timber products and related jobs; reduce chronic sediment sources in Willow Creek and Burnt Fork of the Bitterroot River watersheds to improve water quality and bull trout habitat in the long term; restore or improve key habitats such as grasslands, aspen and whitebark pine.

Project likely to provide 30 million (mm) board feet of timber product over a 5-10 year time period. Large analysis area with about 10,000 acres proposed for treatment in preliminary proposed action. Implementation would entail projects of various sizes, implemented over a period of years.

##### **Silviculture Discussion-Cheri Hartless**

Project located in several ecotones, different elevations, aspects. Different species and types of vegetation depending upon elevation and aspect and management of these require different kinds of treatments depending upon stand condition and desired conditions. Several pathogens active in the Gold Butterfly stands: spruce budworm, douglas fir mistletoe, ponderosa moth, douglas fir bark beetle, fire. Do not wish to eliminate insects and disease but



reduce incidence to endemic levels. Will determine units (areas of project) where it makes sense to treat. The landscape is homogenous and the desired condition is to have more diversity.

High elevation Whitebark pine areas have been identified as potential treatment areas by Bob Keane, a whitebark pine expert. Desired conditions in these areas is to maintain the whitebark pine and its ability to regenerate by removing or reducing competition with other species including subalpine spruce. Proposals include daylighting individual whitebark pine trees by clearing an area around each tree by hand, introducing prescribed fire to the stand, or commercial removal of non-whitebark pine species, and planting rust-resistance whitebark pine seedlings from seeds gathered on Bitterroot and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. These types of treatments would be a long term commitment; monitoring of similar treatments has shown success.

Management in old growth stands depends upon species of old growth and condition. Surveys have been completed and will be compiled and reviewed over the next several weeks.

No large blocks of aspen have been found. When located, treatment would depend upon condition of the aspen stand and level of conifer encroachment.

All areas identified for potential treatment in the preliminary proposed action have been reviewed by silviculture. This information gathered and the desired condition will influence potential treatments being carried forward into the proposed action in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

#### **Logging Systems. Nate Barber**

About 7600 acres of commercial harvest proposed with Gold Butterfly preliminary proposed action.

About 1000 acres harvested per decade 1960-1990, since 2000- 200 acres harvest in project area.

Nate described that logging is accomplished in a different way today than in in 1960's. In woods processors, rubber tired skidders are used on slopes less than 40%, more gentle on the landscape than previous methods that included dozers. On slopes greater than 40% (limit for ground based in Forest Plan) skyline yarding occurs. In the distant past dozers were used to skid steep slopes using their blades to control their descent and leaving linear paths of disturbance. Today, trees greater than 7" DBH (diameter breast height) are merchantable because mills have adapted their equipment to smaller diameter logs, in the trees smaller than 8 or 10" DBH were not desirable size classes for lumber mills. Helicopter yarding is very light on the land but not feasible in the Gold Butterfly project due to cost of helicopter yarding and limited value of the product.

Preliminary costs have been calculated and indicate economics of sales would be marginal but still likely to sell. Project may be modified to improve economics of sales and to better reflect conditions found during field surveys.

The question was asked as to what was unique about the area:

- More water than expected.

- Some old growth douglas fir stands were spectacular
- Some unique bird species present that were not expected.
- Lynx habitat is mapped in the project area and so there are standards and guidelines that must be followed. The last documented siting of a lynx was in early 2000's. Have conducted several lynx surveys in the area since the 1990's but no evidence of lynx has been found.
- Great bull trout habitat, very cold water.
- Soils in good shape.
- Limited weeds
- Existing closed roads are well vegetated and stable. Little work would occur on roads proposed to be decommissioned.

Likely that lack of fire has changed the habitat and potential habitat.

### **Junction with FR 13111**

Cole described decommissioning treatments. FR 13111 is a system road has been closed since the 1980's and the stream bank is the road fill. He explained this road is proposed for decommission but only the entrance would be treated to ensure no illegal motorized access as the remainder is stable and well vegetated. This is what many of the closed roads in the proposal look like, and would need no additional treatment.

### **Illegal OHV's**

Cole explained how the trails in this area were blocked with material from the slide and trails decompacted with forest excavator. This treatment could occur other places. It was noted that illegal trails are present near Gleason Lake and should be treated.

Question asked as to how many miles of illegal OHV trails in the project area. Nathan Teats did a GIS query and found 2.1 miles of mapped illegal OHV trails.

Someone also asked if a sign was necessary to indicate motorized or nonmotorized use. The reply is that no, users need to consult the Travel Plan. Signs are not necessary.

Also was asked if bicycles were allowed on illegal OHV trails, yes was the reply.

A Forest Plan amendment will be required for Elk Habitat Effectiveness (EHE), as 2 Third Order Drainages do not meet the standard for Elk Habitat Effectiveness (2 miles/square mile of land/Third Order Drainage). It is possible that we'll not be able to meet EHE due to open main roads such as the road to the lookout.

Forest plan discusses treatments that can occur in Old Growth. As described in the Forest Plan, treatments in old growth can include sanitation, salvage, regeneration or avoidance as long as standards are met.

### **Junction of FR 364 and 969**

#### **Hydrology**

Willow Creek has very cold water, due to geology, shading, and ground water influence.

The Willow Creek road was constructed in the early 1900's and it's not likely it would be built in this location today due to the risks presented to water quality by its location. Today our task is reduce sediment contributions as much as possible by graveling, rocking the ditches, cross drainage with filter strips. Road improvement package would focus on areas near streams and design improvements to reduce erosion and sediment contributions. Upgrades would be required to occur prior to hauling and maintenance would have to occur throughout project hauling periods to maintain drainage features to protect water quality.

Log hauling will increase risk of sediment contributions from that road. Ed is concerned about hauling during wet weather, winter conditions.

Willow Creek is a 303d listed stream. We are required to apply BMP's to improve water quality on FR 364 prior to haul.

### **Fisheries**

Willow and tributaries are spawning and rearing stream for bull trout and cut throat trout.

Sediment affects habitat conditions and reduces spawning success.

Other threats to native fish include non-native fish that are more adapted to warmer waters and more sediment, irrigation withdrawals that reduce connectivity to the Bitterroot River, and access to refugia (other clean, cold, connected waters).

Fisheries biologist works directly with other resources to identify fisheries needs and design project that will maintain or preferably improve habitat for fish.

The group returned to the Supervisor's Office about 1715.